

December 1, 2004

TO: Chief School Administrators

FROM: Ellen Frede, Ph.D.  
Assistant to the Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood Education

RE: Early Launch to Learning Funding Opportunity, **Program Planning Funds**

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In the FY 2005 budget address an exciting new vision for preschool in New Jersey. The Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI) will increase access to preschool for four year olds statewide. In March 2004, the Department of Education called for applicants for the ELLI award to expand access to high quality preschool for low-income children in New Jersey. As of December 2004, 27 districts were awarded funding. The Office of Early Childhood Education is now pleased to open this funding opportunity for planning support to apply for a 2005-2006 ELLI award.

The long term aim of ELLI is to provide access to high quality preschool for all four year olds in New Jersey by 2010. The interest to the taxpayers of New Jersey is clear: high-quality preschool results in savings to society over time and improves the quality of life, not only for the participants and their families, but for the communities as a whole. Currently, too many children are in low quality care, and parents have great difficulty finding and paying for good educational experiences for their young children.

Through a competitive award process, ELLI funds low income children's participation in preschool. Other children are supported through braided funding using a combination of existing district funds (general fund or other funds), collaboration with Head Start and child care, and parent tuition. The classes are comprised of children with disabilities, children from low-income families and children supported through other means. Districts already receiving Early Childhood Program Aid, with the exclusion of Abbott districts, are eligible for funding to increase from half day to full day programs. Many eligible districts have not yet applied for this funding. The Department recognizes that planning to add preschool to a school system can be complex and cost-prohibitive. Therefore, funding is now being offered to support districts to prepare to submit a full-fledged ELLI implementation proposal this Spring.

Detailed information and instructions for the Early Launch to Learning Initiative are available on the Department of Education website at <http://www.nj.gov/njded/ece/>.